

## Obituary

# Professor John Edgar Morison OBE, MD, DSc, FRCOG, FRCPath (1912-2007)

J Denis Biggart, Dorothy M Hayes, Ingrid V Allen

Dr JE Morison, later to become Honorary Professor of Histopathology, died on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 aged 95, after a short illness. To all his colleagues he was familiarly known as 'John Edgar'. He gave outstanding service to the Ulster Medical Society, acting as editor of the *Ulster Medical Journal* for 32 years (1951-1984). Professor DAD Montgomery was his co-editor from 1975-1984. In his review of "The Editors of the UMJ"<sup>1</sup>, Professor David Hadden has commented on how the journal prospered under his guidance, becoming internationally recognised "with citations in Current Contents as well as the Index Medicus, the predecessor of Medline". His broad knowledge of pathology helped greatly in the assessment of the worthiness of submitted articles. He was a stickler for the use of good English and grammar, often by himself undertaking major rewriting if he considered the basic content worthwhile. In 1974-1975 he became President of the Ulster Medical Society<sup>2</sup> and in 1979 was made an Honorary Fellow. He also valued his Honorary Fellowships of the Ulster Surgical Club and the Ulster Obstetric Society. He was a founder member of the Paediatric Pathology Club in 1955 which evolved into the Paediatric Pathology Society in 1962.

He was born in Banbridge in 1912 and educated at Banbridge Academy. In 1929 he entered the Medical Faculty of Queen's University, where he pursued a distinguished undergraduate career graduating in 1935, MB BCH BAO with Honours and First Place Scholarship. In 1937 he joined the University Department of Pathology as a research assistant and was made lecturer in 1942. His theses earned an MD with gold medal in 1940 and a DSc in 1951. Despite heavy teaching and diagnostic work, he published many papers in pathology and bacteriology. It was at this time that he became interested in the pathology of the neonatal period and was awarded a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship to Harvard Medical School at Boston Children's Hospital (1946-1947). Returning to Belfast he was appointed Reader and admitted to the pre-NHS visiting staff of the Royal Victoria Hospital. Undoubtedly his most outstanding academic contribution was his authorship of the pioneering book "Foetal and Neonatal Pathology" first published in 1951 with new editions in 1963 and 1971. These were translated into Italian, Spanish and Japanese. Thereafter, wherever in the world Queen's graduates travelled, they were amazed by how John Edgar's book was regarded as a unique masterpiece in the field of neonatal pathology, which had placed Belfast firmly on the international map. In 1960 his international reputation was borne out by an invitation from the British Council to undertake a ten week visit to Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil, where there was an awakening interest in perinatal problems. His contacts in North America were maintained by visits and he acted as Guest Professor at Illinois University in Chicago.



In 1954 he resigned his Readership in the University to become an NHS consultant histopathologist, based in the Central Laboratory on the City Hospital site. For more than ten years he provided a superb single-handed postal biopsy service to the rural district hospitals in Northern Ireland and even found time to travel to these hospitals to perform autopsies on the more puzzling cases. Based on his encyclopaedic knowledge, his reports were noteworthy for their detailed advice on the treatment and prognosis of the rarer diseases. The clinicians recognised that in John Edgar they had an intellectual friend to whom they could always turn for help. This was of particular importance in the pre-1960 era before the establishment of medical libraries in the provincial hospitals. It was not until 1965 that he acquired the able support of another pathologist, Dr Dorothy Hayes, who became his co-consultant in 1971. Together, with the help of highly skilled technical staff, they coped with an enormous workload which grew to 24,000 surgical biopsies per year, prior to laboratory decentralisation in the early 1970s and the setting up of separate laboratories in the major provincial hospitals. A shortage of pathology trainees delayed his retirement until 1984 when he was seventy-two. He was awarded an OBE for his services to medicine.

His interests included travel, gardening, photography, collecting antique Irish glass and restoring old furniture. He leaves a wife, Ellen, three children and six grandchildren.

## REFERENCES:

1. Hadden DR. The Editors of the UMJ. *Ulster Med J* 2006;**75**(1): 5-10.
2. Morison JE. One entrance into life. *Ulster Med J* 1975;**44**(1):1-14